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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE CORPS OF CADETS

OF THE

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY.

BY IVERS J. AUSTIN, ESQ.

A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF VISITORS.

JUNE, 1842.

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U. S. M. A., West Point, N. Y., }
June 18th, 1842.

SIR :

WE, the undersigned, a Committee in behalf of the present Corps of Cadets, and of the Class just graduated, have the honor to request of you for publication, a copy of the chaste and peculiarly appropriate address delivered by you before them on 17th inst.

Sir,

We are, with the highest respect,

Your ob't serv'ts,

J. PRESTON JOHNSTONE, }
C. COLON AUGUR, } Committee.
W. B. FRANKLIN, }

TO IVERS J. AUSTIN, Esq.,
Of Massachusetts.

West Point, June 20th, 1842.

To Cadets

J. PRESTON JOHNSTONE, }
W. B. FRANKLIN, } Committee, &c.
C. COLON AUGUR, }

GENTLEMEN :

THE address, which, by appointment of the Board of Visitors, I had the honor of delivering before the Corps of Cadets, is herewith, in compliance with your highly flattering request, submitted to your disposal.

With much esteem,

I am, gentlemen,

Your ob't serv't,

IVERS J. AUSTIN.



ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE CORPS OF CADETS :

I HAVE been commissioned by the Board of Visitors to express to you upon this occasion the satisfaction they have felt in witnessing your various military and academic performances, and in attending your most interesting and arduous examination. I shall not transcend the powers confided to me ; I shall not be deemed guilty of extravagant assertion, nor do violence to the sentiments of any member of the Board ; but, on the contrary, shall express their unanimous opinion when I say, that more high-toned discipline or better conduct, greater precision and accuracy of thought—more remarkable exhibitions of the combined effects of talent and perseverance—more triumphant results of that rare and happy union of intellect and industry on the side of the student, with skill, genius, and fidelity, on the part of the professor, have never been witnessed by any of our number in any portion of the country.

I congratulate you, gentlemen—I congratulate your officers and professors—I congratulate our common country upon the brilliant and noble results you and they have been thus able to achieve. Permit me also to offer to you, in the name of the Board of Visitors, their con-

gratulations that your trials are so near their end, and to tender to you their most cordial and sincere wishes for your future prosperity and happiness. I trust that it is entirely unnecessary for me to add, that these feelings are most warmly and truly entertained by myself.

To be the organ of the Board upon this occasion, is to me a peculiarly pleasant office. Although many if not most of your officers and professors have both entered and graduated from the Academy since I was a cadet, I still see around me several of those with whom I passed through a portion of my academic career. Some of these gentlemen were my classmates and personal friends—others assisted my feeble steps along the rough roads of mathematics—and some even at that time commanded my respect, from the indications they gave of that character, eminence, and fame, they have since so successfully won, and now so worthily enjoy.

The few years which have elapsed since I also passed through this annual ordeal, have by no means rendered me oblivious of the deep anxiety engendered by its approach—of the tremendous excitement occasioned by its presence—nor of the rapturous delight with which I hailed its termination. It was to me the one event of life. Every pulse trembled with emotion—every nerve vibrated with excitement, lest some unhappy mistake should injure or destroy the labor of a year. The intense desire for success almost destroyed the power of achieving it. I envied those hardy constitutions and those nerveless temperaments which could view without apprehensions the terrors of a June examination. Believe

me, even at this day, "*in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon man in slumberings in the bed,*" my disturbed imagination sometimes shadows forth the misery of a failure upon occasions like these. And when too, at those terrible black-boards, which more than any other contrivance for instruction test the faculties, prove the knowledge, develop the capacity, and exhibit the power of mental abstraction possessed by a student—when I saw you there, without hope or possibility, or perchance even desire, of assistance from your neighbors, subjected to the able and scrutinizing cross-examination of your professors, ignorant upon what topic the next question would touch, or whether you might not most unwillingly be called upon to undergo the grievous penance of "confession," I fought my own battles over again, and scarcely realized that more than fourteen years had passed since one of those very gentleman had most woefully puzzled me.

Be assured, therefore, my friends, that I fully sympathize in the joy which you must feel at the approaching termination of your ordeal—a joy properly greater, that you have passed through it thus far with so much honor, and with the creation of such sanguine and well-founded expectations, that your future career as officers in the army, will be as honorable and beneficial to the country, as your past career as cadets in this Academy has been useful and creditable to yourselves.

In years to come—when you are released from the trammels which the pursuit of education necessarily

imposes—when your places shall be supplied by a new generation, and the memory of your labors here remain only as of a pleasant dream, I hope again to meet you in the active and practical occupations of life. Although the difference of our years is not great—although no such disparity of age exists between some of us as to render it impossible, that in the ordinary progress of events, in the “ceaseless course” of time, if any of you should leave the duties of military, and assume the responsibilities and cares of civil stations, we may yet be found honorable rivals in the same field; yet I trust that a few observations will not be considered by you as either inappropriate or unacceptable, suggested as they are by the deep interest every graduate from this Institution always must and always should feel in all things pertaining to its usefulness, its honor, its prosperity, or its fame.

To those of you whose last hours as cadets are rapidly approaching—who are about to reap the reward of faithful perseverance in the duties of the Academy by receiving promotion to a higher rank in the national service—I can only say, God speed you—God bless you! There are many illustrious examples holden up for your imitation, both of the hallowed dead whose deeds and whose fame are your heritage as they are that of every American; but of the honored living whom Providence has yet spared to ornament and ennoble the profession of arms. See to it, that these examples are ever before you. You may at no distant day be called to occupy the stations they have so worthily filled. See to it, young men, that no temptation, whether of the exu-

berance or the thoughtlessness of youth, cause you to swerve one hair's breadth from the paths they have followed. Remember that you have not only to create for yourselves your individual and personal characters, upon which alone, in this country, any man either can or should successfully rely—but you have also the far harder and more difficult task of maintaining the reputation of the army to which they have added so much lustre. Upon this day, consecrated in the hearts of American freemen—upon this sacred anniversary of the first great battle of the revolution, of the first great and bloody sacrifice upon the altar of freedom—from your resolutions record your vows, pledge your faith, that you will be no degenerate successors of Warren, of Prescott, or of Putnam; of Hale and Knowlton—of Lincoln and Knox—of Gates and Greene. The shades of Brown and Macomb forbid you to falter. Remember the generous daring, the heroic courage of Izzard—the uncalculating patriotism of Center and of Mudge. Yonder cenotaph,* which has so long ornamented your plain, appeals to you in mute but expressive eloquence, to prove yourselves worthy followers of the noble officer whose memory it honors. The gallant Thompson† cries

* A monument to the memory of Lt. Col. Wood of the corps of Engineers, and a graduate of the Academy. He fell while leading the charge at the sortie of Fort Erie, U. C., 17th Sept., 1814.

† Lt. Col. Thompson fell 25th December, 1837, at the battle of Okeechobee, Florida, in a successful charge, at the head of his regiment. Col. Thompson, Luiets, Izzard, Center, Mudge, and Basinger, were graduates of the Academy. The last four since 1827.

to you from the bloody fields of Florida to forget not the unfading glory of his dying scene. And if at any future time, amidst doubt, or difficulty, or danger, you shall be required to labor in obscurity, with no chance for that fame which next to the approval of his conscience is the soldier's highest hope—if your country shall be heedless of your services and regardless of your sufferings, when you shall have no reliance but on your own right arm, and no trust but in the mercy of your God—bring before you, with living distinctness, the lion-hearted courage of that gallant graduate and excellent man, the massacred Basinger. The dying scene of that murdered officer would crown with honor and fame the longest life of public service. Surrounded and beset with savage, and cruel, and desperate enemies—every other officer struck down before his eyes—himself covered with wounds and bleeding at every pore—“hopeless not heartless,” “he strove and struggled yet,”

“The last faint quittance rendering with his breath,
Till the blade glimmered in the grasp of death”—

finding strength, amidst all the horrors of his situation, to exclaim, ere the tomahawk drank the last drop of his life blood, “I am the only officer left, and, boys, WE WILL DO THE BEST WE CAN.”

Forget not those living examples so conspicuously before you. Let the high-toned discipline—the indefatigable perseverance—the stern resolve—the chivalric courage of a WORTH, be ever a steady beacon light before you, which no cloud of adversity shall ever extinguish. And when some of you shall be raised to elevated stations—

when some of you shall be called upon to preside over the destinies of our army—when your names shall be familiar to the world, as well for prudent councils in the cabinet, as for daring deeds upon the field—may a grateful people greet you with the same confidence, affection, and respect, which form so enviable and honorable a crown to the character and services of a SCOTT.

Upon those of you, my friends, whose career as cadets is not yet finished, and especially upon those of you who all inexperienced in the severe requisitions of military discipline, have but just entered upon its unknown and untried paths, permit me to urge, with all the force and sincerity of which I am capable, the often repeated, but never to be forgotten maxim—that obedience is the honor of a soldier—which, as delicate as a woman's, must not be suspected. I am the more inclined to urge this truth upon you, because I well remember how pleasant it was sometimes to evade the regulations. The very danger of detection rendered the risk delightful. Scarce any one who did not sometimes grow restive under restraint, and especially those to whom custom had not rendered discipline easy.

But remember, young men, that you are here forming habits that are to last you through life. This I know is equally true of any other institution. But rely upon it, that the nature of the discipline you are here subjected to, the character of the subjects you here study, and the character of thought you here acquire, will exert a more permanent and important influence upon the mind, than those of any other seminaries. In no way can the de-

signed effects of this institution be more effectually realized, than by a steady, persevering, inflexible, conscientious obedience to all its requisitions. Remember that no rule, order, or regulation, can be intentionally evaded—no demand of duty can be designedly disregarded, without weakening that *habit* of obedience, which is the first duty as it is the highest honor of a soldier.

Every man has some one to obey. Each grade of life has some superior; the good citizen sedulously obeys the mandates of law; the good christian reverently observes the precepts of revelation. Your honored and most able superintendent, to whom, permit me to say, you owe great and lasting obligations, is equally with yourselves under the control of the Department. This again, though with a wider circle of action, is subjected to the President, who, uniting in his high office the responsibilities of all, finds his truest honor and his greatest glory, in obedience to the Constitution, and in deference to the will of that mighty sovereign, the American people, who raised him to, and sustain him in, the sublimest station on earth.

You are all destined one day to command. He who would worthily command, must first learn worthily to obey; must first acquire the art of rendering that cheerful and easy obedience, which results from a settled principle of life, and not merely from the necessity of a fugitive occasion.

Permit me to allude to one more topic, which in my day seemed of some importance.

It has been said by a celebrated French writer, that “there is no necessary man in the world.” However

much his loss may be deplored; however closely he may have identified himself with public institutions or public business—it is a mortifying and melancholy reflection that his place is soon supplied, and the world goes on just as well without him.

This is emphatically true of this Institution. There is here no necessary cadet. Other Academies depend, in a greater or less degree, for support upon the income derived from their pupils. No such dependence exists here. It is a matter of no pecuniary gain, but rather of pecuniary loss to the Government, that the numbers at this Institution are large. I know with what supreme contempt mere money considerations, in connection with important affairs, used to be, and doubtless now are, regarded by the corps—for thoughts, and opinions, and feelings, are handed down here from class to class, very much as traditionary recollections, upon a wider scale, are transmitted from generation to generation. But you will learn before long, that these matters, contemptible as to your generous spirits they now appear, and as abstractly they perhaps really are, yet exercise a vast influence upon the relations of life. The difficulty of obtaining from Congress appropriations for the current expenditures of Government—the proposed reduction of our gallant army—the many recent and curiously minute investigations into public expenditures—if in your comparative seclusion from politics such things have ever attracted your notice—may serve to illustrate the truth of these remarks.

Now what I intend to say is this—that Government,

having no need of cadets to support the Institution—it being a matter of no pecuniary moment to it that the numbers at the Academy are large or small—thousands of applicants, annually denied the boon of admission, are able to adopt a high standard of excellence, up to which every man must come who expects to receive its honors. It is of no consequence, that an individual has a good excuse for not reaching this standard. If he have no excuse or a bad one, he is punished for his fault. If he have a good excuse, he must suffer the consequences of his misfortune as he best may. The country wants capable, and not merely willing officers. It wants those who have proved their ability by actually meeting the requisitions of the Academy, and not those who can furnish a good excuse for their failure. He, therefore, who fails to reach the minimum of excellence, whether his failure be occasioned by his fault, his folly, or misfortune, must expect nothing from the Government.

To reach this minimum, may require all the attention, all the labor, all the resolution of some. Others, by a single effort of extraordinary genius, may pass it with a bound; while others, with all the intention to succeed, may entirely fail of attaining it. I hope that the good seed of the Academy will all be sown upon fertile soil and yield an abundant harvest. But even the seed of the sower in the parable, which fell upon good ground, did not all of it meet with equal success, for some brought forth an hundred fold, some only sixty, and some again only thirty. It is however equally the duty of every cadet to strive, with all his energy and all his power, “to

do the best he can," and by no means to rest satisfied with barely meeting the requisitions of the Academy, with just passing an examination, and merely saving his distance, when by more exertion he might be enabled, if not to gain the race, at least to bring up nearer to the winning post.

You here enjoy advantages of scientific instruction equalled by those of no other institution in the country ; and I think it may be safely asserted, surpassed by those of no other institution in the world. Other schools may have larger cabinets, more extensive libraries, more costly apparatus, more numerous materials of instruction ; but in no one that has ever come under my observation—in no one that I have ever heard of—does the student receive so much personal instruction, so much direct, individual attention, from his teacher. In no institution is the fame of the professor so identified with the success of the pupil. Your honor is your instructor's praise—your reputation, your individual reputation, and not that merely of your class, is their glory. You may think it a very easy and a very agreeable occupation—when I was a cadet some of us were accustomed to think so—for *your professor to sit at ease behind his desk and put questions to you that you cannot answer* ; it may seem very cruel to you, when they sit at the examination table and smile as in derision ; but believe me, when they do smile it is more in agony than mirth, at the mistakes you seem about to make ; but I am much mistaken if this duty of examination is not one of intense anxiety and severe and exhausting labor—and one which tries their powers full

as much as it ever can try yours. It is an ordeal to them as well as to you—one which probably no set of teachers in the world is made so sensibly to feel—and one besides which induces them earnestly to strive for the success of each individual, and not merely for the ultimate character of the class. You may be assured, my friends, that the diploma of this Academy is received in the world—not only as conclusive evidence that its owner is a gentleman, that he is possessed of all those high sentiments of honor which constitute such a character—but also that he is possessed of mental qualifications of no ordinary nature. In whatever pursuit you hereafter engage, whether you continue in the duties of military, or engage in the occupations of civil life, you will never fail to feel the influence of your success as a graduate of the Military Academy. You will have a harder, a far harder task to maintain the stand you thus acquire, than you ever had while striving as a cadet to obtain your diploma. Such is the advantage you will all experience upon entering the world. Such is the high reputation of this Institution. Such the fame its officers and professors have created for it. Such the powerful, and what ought to be the irresistible inducement for each one of you, whether his relative merit shall place him at the head or the foot of his class, to strive with all the energy the God of nature has bestowed upon him, to do, in the language of that immortal death cry, “THE BEST HE CAN.” Rely upon it, that the graduates of this Academy are supposed to possess a more thorough, a more useful, a more practical know-

ledge of their course of studies, than those who take the highest honors of a college are supposed to possess of theirs. Rely upon it, that the world has hitherto supposed—and either with or without reason—apparently will ever continue to suppose, that merely to graduate as a cadet, is evidence of higher powers of mind and greater force of character than are enjoyed by most young men. Such is the opinion which every man successfully leaving this institution is supposed to justify. Such is the expectation, which in some instances I know to be too high, he is required to realize.

It is therefore a poor pride, that of boasting that lessons are learned without studying, and a high rank attained without exertion. If true, it demonstrates only the absence of that systematic, persevering industry which is better than genius, (I had almost said which was itself genius,) which alone in active and practical life can command and insure success in any pursuit. It is a false and miserable pride, that of being ashamed of any labor, however continued, however severe, however intense—in the acquisition of knowledge. Better—far, far better to graduate at the foot of the class—in fearful proximity to those dreadful “*daggers*,” which have sometimes almost found the life blood of a student—but at the same time with fixed habits of untiring industry—than to leave the Academy radiant with the glittering honors of a “*star*,” but destitute of that principle of perseverance, which is one of the best results of your academic discipline. The first, in after life, will inevitably succeed—the last, unless fortune or Providence assist him, will almost as inevitably fail.

But, my friends, my brother cadets I was almost about to say, I have not been through this Institution in vain. I will prove it. In my day I well remember the universal opinion to be, that short speeches after examination, were as grateful as short graces before dinner. Having present to my mind, with great distinctness, our feelings upon these occasions, I will therefore take advantage of this opportunity, the only one I shall ever enjoy of addressing you, to remark in conclusion, that the result of the examination, which, as a member of the Board of Visitors, I have had an official opportunity of witnessing, has abundantly satisfied my mind, that since I wore its honored uniform, the course of the Academy has been by no means retrograde. On the contrary, it has been onward and upward. Long may it continue to be so. Long may the Military Academy be rooted in the confidence and affection of the American people, as firmly as the noble hills which surround it are fastened to the bosom of the earth. Long may it be worthy of adopting for its own, the emblem* of the magnificent state in which it is located. Long may its rising sun ascend higher and higher from the horizon, shining more and more unto that perfect day, when no mist of prejudice, no cloud of distrust, shall be able to extinguish or obscure one ray of its brightness.

* A rising sun with the motto "Excelsior."

